

New swimming pool, Streatley House, High Street, Streatley, West Berkshire

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
for Mrs Sarah Brownlee**

by Andy Taylor

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code SHS 20/57

June 2020

Summary

Site name: New swimming pool, Streatley House, High Street, Streatley, West Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 5939 8068

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 27th April to 11th May 2020

Project coordinator: Tim Dawson

Site supervisor: Will Attard, Kyle Beaverstock and Jon Tierney

Site code: SHS 20/57

Area of site: 110 m sq

Summary of results: Construction of a new swimming pool building comprised the digging of pad foundations and an area of ground reduction for the pool itself. Most of the pad foundations reached the natural geology (chalk) but the pool did not as it was located in an area of deep made ground. A late post-medieval wall was observed to have been rebuilt on a slightly different alignment. No deposits nor finds of archaeological interest were identified.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with West Berkshire Museum in due course, with a digital version uploaded to OASiS database.

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Report 20/57

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at on a new swimming pool at Streatley House, High Street, Streatley, West Berkshire (SU 5940 8068) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Gary Taylor, Director of Origin Leisure Ltd, Unit 5, Summerhouse Business Park, Harefield, Middlesex, UB9 6TH on behalf of Mr and Mrs Brownlee of Streatley House, High Street, Streatley, West Berkshire, RG8 9HY.

Planning consent (20/00349/HOUSE) has been gained from West Berkshire Council for the construction of a new indoor swimming pool within the grounds of Streatley House. This consent includes a condition (5) relating to archaeology requiring a watching brief to be carried out during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2019) and the Councils policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Sarah Orr, Senior Archaeologist with West Berkshire Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Will Attard, Kyle Beaverstock and Jon Tierney between 27th April and 11th May 2020 and the site code is SHS 20/57.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with West Berkshire Museum or Archaeology Data Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in the centre of Streatley, which lies *c.*21km NE of Reading. It is on the southern side of the High Street and is set back from Streatley House itself and next to a garden building and patio (Fig. 2). The underlying geology is mapped as Upper Chalk (BGS 2000) and it lies at a height of *c.*46m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems mainly from its location within the medieval core of Streatley but it also lies in the archaeologically rich Thames Valley on the eastern margins of the Berkshire Downs close to

Goring Gap, There is a clear focus of prehistoric activity and burial locally, with the earliest remains being of Upper Palaeolithic date near Gatehampton. Neolithic tools on Lough Down, a Bronze Age barrow cemetery on Thurle Down and Iron Age/Roman field boundaries at Streatley Warren are notable (Gates 1975; Richards 1978; Roe 1994; McNicoll-Norbury 2008; Allen 1995). Roman coins discovered within the village suggest settlement in the near environs but the location of this, as yet, has not been discovered. A Saxon settlement is indicated in this area by references to charters of the time. 'Stretlea' is first recorded in AD690 with the charters of King Ine of Wessex, though the village is recorded as 'Estriei' by the Domesday Book of 1086.

The local parish church of St. Mary has a 15th century tower, though largely rebuilt in 1865 (Tyack *et al* 2010). The Domesday Survey records a large settlement along with a mill, fisheries and the church (Williams and Martin 2002, 154), though no trace of this building is represented by the present structure. There is later reference to a Dominican Nunnery close to the parish church, though the existence of this too is yet to be proven.

Streatley House itself, some 80m from the pool site, is a large, brick townhouse dated from 1765 (Grade II*, 1213395). Wings were added to both side of the frontage, that are now individually Listed properties (West, Grade II, *c.*1800 and East, Grade II, *c.*1740). The land it sits on was once owned by the Rectory, controlled by the Bishops of Salisbury until 1670 (VCH 1923). The historic mapping of 1878 shows this later sub-division of the gardens, for construction of other buildings. A blocked garden doorway has been part of past changes to the boundary wall immediately to the north (Pl.1).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits or finds affected by the new construction work. In general, the watching brief would involve the examination of any areas of ground reduction, excavation for the pool and the digging of trenches for services as necessary. Areas observed consisted of a foundation trench for the swimming pool then the reduction of the ground within the wall.

Results

Foundation pads

The majority of the foundation pads measured *c.*1m wide and was dug to a depth of *c.*1.50m. The northern portion of these were positioned evenly against an existing brick and flint wall (Fig.3). Each was excavated in eight separate sections (F1-F8), in two groups of four, in order to preserve the integrity of the existing wall (Fig.4)

F1: This was dug to a depth of 2m and the stratigraphy consisted of 0.57m of made ground consisting of soil, brick/tile and slate fragments. This overlay 0.78m of subsoil overlying chalk natural geology.

F2: This was dug to a depth of 2.20m and the stratigraphy consisted of 0.60m of brick rubble made ground overlying 1.10m of subsoil overlying chalk natural geology. In the western face, part of a wall foundation was exposed comprising brick with a flint core. This foundation was offset from the current wall at a position where the latter has a right-angled kink. (Fig. 3). The foundation aligns well with the eastern section of the extant wall and the observation indicates that an originally straight wall was partly rebuilt on a new line incorporating the right angled kink.

F3: This was dug to a depth of 1.70m and the stratigraphy consisted of 0.40m of wall foundation overlying 0.50m of made ground. This overlay 0.30m of subsoil overlying chalk natural geology.

F4: This was dug to a depth of 1.50m and the stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of wall foundation overlying 0.80m of made ground. This overlay 0.35m of subsoil overlying chalk natural geology.

F5: This was dug to a depth of 1.75m and the stratigraphy consisted of 0.40m of wall foundation overlying 0.20m of made ground. This overlay 0.90m of subsoil overlying chalk natural geology.

F6: This was dug to a depth of 1.70m and the stratigraphy consisted of 0.90m of wall foundation overlying 0.40m of made ground, This overlay 0.20m of subsoil overlying chalk natural geology.

F7: This was dug to a depth of 1.80m and the stratigraphy consisted of 0.75m of wall foundation overlying 0.45m of made ground overlying chalk natural geology.

F8: This was dug to a depth of 1.60m and the stratigraphy consisted of 0.27m of wall foundation overlying 1.03m of made ground overlying 0.30m of subsoil.

Pool base reduction

Once the concrete had been laid for the foundation the interior of this area was reduced by between 1.50m and 1.80m with the stratigraphy being consistent with that observed in the foundation trenches, namely the entire depth comprised made ground with no natural geology exposed. No archaeological deposits were encountered (Fig.4).

Finds

No finds of an archaeological nature were recovered during the watching brief.

Conclusion

The main component of the groundworks, namely excavation of an area for the new pool were found to be located in an area of deep made ground and the natural chalk geology (the archaeologically relevant horizon)

was not exposed. It was noted that the extant wall had been partly rebuilt on a new alignment to incorporate a right angled kink. Despite the sites' potential for archaeology to be present no deposits nor finds of archaeological interest were encountered during the watching brief.

References

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